DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 466 UD 031 621

AUTHOR	Pappas, Georgia
TITLE	Forging Home-School Partnerships with Latino Families.
INSTITUTION	Latin American Research and Service Agency, Denver, CO.
PUB DATE	Mar 97
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	LARASA, 309 W. 1st Avenue, Denver, CO 80223 (1 year subscription, $12; reports, $2 each).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
JOURNAL CIT	LARASA/REPORT Mar 1997
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cultural Awareness; Elementary Secondary Education; *Hispanic Americans; *Limited English Speaking; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; Parent School Relationship; *Partnerships in Education; *School Role
IDENTIFIERS	Hispanic American Students; *Latinos

ABSTRACT

In the U.S. school system, parents are expected to take responsibility for their children's educational success by preparing them for school, teaching basic skills, and reinforcing what goes on in the classroom. Latino parents who are not completely acculturated usually believe that it is their duty to instill proper behavior in the child, and that it is the school's responsibility to impart knowledge. These parents may think that the behavior expected of them by the school is unwanted interference. The inability to understand English is another major deterrent to the participation of Latino parents in their children's schooling, as is the lack of knowledge about the school system. Latino parents can and do establish effective partnerships with schools once cultural unawareness and communication gaps are overcome. Schools that are successful in engaging Latino parents operate from the belief that these parents want to help their children but may not know how. Cultural competency training for teachers can help make them comfortable in outreach and communication activities. The hardest part of building a partnership with low-income Latino parents is getting them to the first school meeting. School involvement can become more relevant to Latino families when it is intergenerational and includes extended family members. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Forging Home-School Partnerships with Latino Families. LARASA Report.

ED 406 466

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Georgia Pappas
LARASA

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

UD031621

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

L•A•R•A•S•A/ *REPORT*
Latin American Research and Service Agency
March 1997 A Publication About Latinos in Colorado

FORGING HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS WITH LATINO FAMILIES

Latino parents want their children to succeed in school but are more likely to be disengaged than other parents.[1] Parental involvement in education is crucial to the student's academic achievement. While teachers and administrators recognize the importance of forging stronger relationships between the classroom and Latino homes, they may not have the understanding of the Latino community or the skills needed to foster parental involvement.

School administrators and teachers can misread the reserve, the non-confrontational manners, and the non-involvement of Latino parents to mean that they are uncaring about their children's education.[3]

Negative stereotypes that some school personnel form toward Latino parents stem mainly from an unfamiliarity with the family traditions and the life realities of Latino parents, particularly if they are low-income and less acculturated.[2]

Some Teachers Perceptions About Latino Parents

...I send home notes and I call and still I can't get them to a meeting. I think that a lot of them just don't care.[2]

...where have they been all their lives? The children don't know anything. They come into kindergarten without knowing colors or numbers. They can't hold a pencil.[2]

Some Latino Perceptions About Schools

...I am called by the school when there is a problem with my son, then the teachers make me feel embarrassed and hurt about his behavior. I feel I don't belong in the school.[2]

...the teachers are professional people. They know what is best for children. I went to the third grade; how can I question my son's teacher? She knows what is best or him.[2]

Traditionally, this nation's education system is designed to serve students from White middle class families. However, today, with a changing shift in ethnic minority populations, schools are not prepared to serve large numbers of low-income Latino students who may speak little English and struggle with the social ills of inner-city life.[2] In the Denver Metro area, population patterns have altered over the last decade with increasing Latino populations. For example, in Denver Public Schools the Latino student enrollment was 36.7 percent in 1988 and increased to 47.5 percent in 1996.[4] With the elimination of court-ordered busing, there will be dramatic ethnic changes among some DPS schools. Within a year, the Latino student enrollment at Manual High School is expected to go from 14 percent in 1996 to 51 percent in 1997.[5]

BARRIERS TO LATINO HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Before attempting to engage Latino parents into the school, it is important to understand the dynamics within the Latino community being served and the dynamics within the school. Each Latino community is different regarding levels of acculturation, language ability, income, educational attainment, etc. Learn the demographics of the Latinos community to provide a picture of who is being served. Beyond the numbers, it is important to understand the attitudes and belief systems Latino parents have about education. It is equally important to identify the attitudes and beliefs educators have about Latino parents.

Cultural Differences in Viewing Parents' Role

In the U.S. school system, parents are expected to take responsibility for their children's educational success by preparing them for

school, teaching basic skills and reinforcing what goes on in the classroom after children reach school age. Most low-income Latino immigrant and migrant parents are unfamiliar with this role. In their countries the role of parents and the role of schools are sharply delineated and as a result, they separate themselves from the educational process.[2]

Less acculturated Latino parents believe it is their duty to instill respect and proper behavior in their children and it is the school's job to instill knowledge.[2] Therefore, immigrant Latino parents may consider the kind of participation expected of them as unwanted interference and disrespect.[6] However, research has shown that once Latino parents are exposed to and participate in parent programs, their attitudes about school involvement change.[7]

Speaking Spanish

The inability to understand the language of the school is a major deterrent to the participation of Spanish speaking parents. A language barrier make interactions with schools difficult and parents will rarely make the attempt.[7] Latino parents that speak Spanish and aren't proficient in English, or are embarrassed about their accent, may appear shy, passive, non-communicative uninvolved and/or uncaring.[8]

When schools do not provide someone who speaks Spanish, parents are forced to rely on their own children to translate for them, resulting in poor communication between parent and school. Young children who are forced in the role of translator are too immature to do the appropriate translation. Older children, when put in the role of translator, may intentionally mislead both their parents and school personnel to avoid blame, punishment, or embarrassment.[8]

Knowledge of the School System

Under-educated, low-income Latino parents may view schools as a vast and intimidating system and will shy away from complex school procedures, organizational patterns, and rules/regulations.[8] The parents view the educational system as a bureaucracy governed by educated non-Latinos whom they have no right to question and that teachers are the experts when it comes to educating their children.[2]

Latino parents are in need of knowing more about their role, rights, and responsibilities in the education of their children. Studies show that parents from low socioeconomic environments wish to be involved in school, but did not know they had the right to ask for anything special from their children's schools.[7]

It is challenging for parent programs to humanize teachers in the eyes of Latino parents and to let parents know that teachers want to talk bilaterally if not bilingually about their students.[2]

Past Educational Experiences

Many Latino parents have dropped out of the very school system that is now educating their children.[2] This hold true in Colorado where the Latino dropout rate is 42 percent for adults 25 and over. For these Latino parents, school is not a symbol of hope and opportunity but is the site of their failure. While they want their children to do well, they may not want to subject themselves to renewed feelings of inadequacy. Parents may fear that teachers will judge their children's potential in terms of their own failure. Without a strong educational background, parents do not know what it takes to prepare a child for school and to support a child's academic progress.[2]

Negative feelings toward home-school interaction are often reinforced when schools communicate with parents only to share bad news about their children. The parents' anxiety or distrust in dealing with schools may be mistaken for apathy, lack of parental support for schooling, or lack of caring about their children's learning.[7]

Attitudes of School Personnel

Negative or condescending attitudes by school personnel will contribute to Latino parents feeling disengaged from the schools. Examples of negative attitudes are when communication with parents is judgmental, written only in English,

This issue was written by Georgia Pappas, Director of Research and edited by Dr. María Guajardo Lucero, Executive Director. The LARASA/*REPORT* is published monthly. A one year subscription is $12, reports are $2 each. For more information contact LARASA, 309 W. 1st Ave., Denver, CO 80223, 303-722-5150.

and/or filled with educational jargon that the parent may not understand.[7]

A study by Sosa found that school personnel often looked down on parents of "at risk" students, blaming them for the student's academic problem. The study revealed that it was not uncommon for Latino parents who went to the school to attempt to solve their child's problems, to be lectured at, scolded, ignored, or rebuffed by school personnel.[6]

The failure of teachers and other school personnel to treat parents with respect was interpreted by many parents that the schools were prejudiced against people of Mexican origin. This perception of discrimination angered the parents and they chose to avoid school personnel altogether.[6]

In addition, there is anti-immigrant sentiment in the US. Immigrant families may live in fear of deportation and are constantly embarrassed about being judged "alien" or "illegal" whether they are or not.[6]

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

> *Overcoming the cultural and social conditioning of low-income Hispanic parents does not require the expenditure of large sums of money. It does, however, require time and energy, patience and persistence. It also requires flexibility.*[2]
>
> Hispanic Policy Development Project

Latino parents and schools can and do establish lasting and effective partnerships once cultural unawareness and communication gaps are overcome. Marketing the idea of a parent-school partnership to low-income Latino parents is not easy. Schools that are successful in engaging Latino parents operate from an enrichment model, with the belief that Latino's want to help their children but may not know how or where to start.[6]

Following are recommendations based on the successful efforts of educators and community groups to improve Latino parent involvement.

Committed Leadership

The most critical element in launching and maintaining a successful parent-school partnership is committed leadership, particularly from principals.[2]

Committed leadership must also come from teachers. Teachers who have developed successful relationships with Latino parents share the following characteristics:

- Teachers developed a long-range systematic plan to increase Latino parental participation.[7]
- Teachers took the attitude that all parents are expected to participate, and if they don't it is the teachers' responsibility to make it happen.[9]
- Teachers did not use parents' ethnicity, income, education, or marital status as excuses for lack of involvement.[9]

Exposure to Diversity

Cultural competency training is beneficial to teachers and administrators who have had limited or no opportunity to deal with culturally and linguistically diverse parents.[7] Also, increased direct contact with parents help dispel misconceptions surrounding homes and replaces them with concrete images of Latino home environments.[7]

Personal Outreach and Communication

Keys to reaching Latino parents are strong personal outreach, warm, non-judgmental communication, and the ability to convey respect for the parents' feelings and concerns. Reaching out to Latino parents involves talking face-to-face with the parents, in their primary language, at their homes, at the school, or wherever a parent can be engaged. Multiple home visits or conversations may be necessary to convince the parent to attend an activity.[2]

> *The most effective strategies were personal. Home visits, grape vines, gatherings at the gate.*[2]
>
> Project Coordinator

Establishing a personal connection and developing a line of communication with Latino

parents is a time consuming process and requires a staff person devoted solely to this task.[2] In addition, personal outreach efforts have been proved to be more successful when organized by people who have volunteered as opposed to people who have been assigned to the job.[3]

Accessibility of Schools

Make it easy for parents to participate in their child's education by providing bilingual materials, arranging for baby-sitting, offering free or low cost programs, arranging meetings at times and locations convenient for parents, and providing interpreters and transportation.[3]

To help close the language gap between home and school, parent advocates can be used as interpreters and recruiters of other parents.[7] Also, it is recommended that schools have staff members trained to facilitate the communication between Spanish speaking parents and school personnel.[6]

In one study, work interference was the primary reason stated by parents for not getting involved in school activities.[7] When parents are summoned during regular school hours to work out problems with school staff, involvement will be hampered for parents who work or are confined to the home with small children and no transportation.[6]

Successful First Meetings

The hardest part of building a partnership with low-income Latino parents is getting parents to the first meeting. Impersonal efforts, such as letters, flyers, announcements at church services or announcements on local radio or TV are typically ineffective, even if in Spanish. The most successful approach is personal, face-to-face conversations with parents, in their primary language, and in their homes.[3]

Allow Latino parents to become involved with the school community at their own pace. Since many low-income Latinos feel uncomfortable in schools, hold the first meetings outside of the school, preferably at sites that are familiar to the parents and are social in nature. Unsuccessful first meetings tend to be formal events held at school with information aimed "at" parents.[3] Before joining existing parent organizations, Latino parents first want to acquire the skills and the confidence to contribute as equals.[3]

Extended Family

School involvement becomes more relevant to Latino families when it is intergenerational and includes extended families.[5] Latino parents are more likely to participate in school activities if they believe their family benefits from the activity.[10]

In addition the Latino extended family is an underutilized source of support for the school. Aunts, uncles grandparents, cousins, godparents, and even friends all play a role in reinforcing family values and rearing children. This is a resource that schools can and should utilize.[3]

Morton Inger suggests that, "Even if the parents are working and cannot volunteer their time, other available family members could serve as a pool of potential volunteers. If the schools need their help, and if this need is made clear, [Latino] family members are more likely to feel welcome, useful, and respected. and this participation could lead to a fuller involvement with the school."[3]

REFERENCES

1 Steinberg, Ph.D., Laurence. Beyond the Classroom. Simon & Schuster: New York, 1996.
2 Nicolau, Siobhan and Carmen Lydia Ramos. Together is Better: Building Strong Relationships Between Schools and Hispanic Parents. Hispanic Policy Development Project, Inc.: New York, 1990.
3 Inger, Morton. "Increasing the School Involvement of Hispanic Parents." ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education Digest. Number 80, August 1992.
4 Summary Report of Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, October 1, 1988 to 1996. Denver public Schools.
5 Weber, Brian. "Manual seeks $685,000 to improve curriculum." Rocky Mountain News, February 14, 1997.
6 Sosa, Alicia. Thorough and Fair: Creating Routes to Success for Mexican-American Students. ERIC:Charleston, WV 1993.
7 Bermúdez, Andrea B. Doing Our Homework: How Schools Can Engage Hispanic Communities. ERIC: Charleston, WV, 1994.
8 López del Bosque, M.Ed., Rogelio. "Moving Beyond 'de los dientes para afuera:' Parental Involvement Requires Sincere Outreach." IDRA Newsletter, June-July 1994.
9 Shannon, Sheila M., and Silvia Lojero Latimer. "Latino Parent Involvement in Schools: A Story of Struggle and Resistance." The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students, Volume 16, Summer 1996.
10 Pappas, Georgia. Horace Mann Neighborhood Center Community Assessment. Latin American Research and Service Agency: Denver, CO, 1997.

NO ALCOHOL OR TOBACCO FUNDING ACCEPTED

United Way Helps Here